

SECRET
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

25 March 1982

Ms. Sylvia Blumenthal
INR/IC, Department of State
Room 8646, New State Building
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Ms. Blumenthal:

This is in response to your request for classification review of the attached, which is a portion of Geographic Intelligence Report Number CIA/RR-G-21, March 1958, pages 3 through 13. The CIA has no objection to the declassification of this portion of the report. It is returned to you herewith.

Sincerely,

25X1

[Redacted Signature Box]
Chief, Classification Review Division
Office of Information Services
Directorate of Administration

Enclosure:

Portion of GIR Rpt.
(#CIA/RR-G-21, Mar 58)

Distribution:

Orig - Addressee w/encl

1 - Liaison w/Dept of State w/encl

1 - Chrono w/o encl

25X1

Unclassified when
Separated from
Enclosure

ROUTING AND TRANSMITTAL

Date

3/15/82

STAT TO: (Name, office symbol, room number, building, Agency/Post) Initials Date

1. 16 Mar 82
2. Classification Review Division
3. CIA/OIS - Room 322 Ames Bldg.
4. INTEL
- 5.

Action	File	Note and Return
Approval	For Clearance	Per Conversation
As Requested	For Correction	Prepare Reply
Circulate	For Your Information	See Me
Comment	Investigate	Signature
Coordination	Justify	

REMARKS

As per our telcon today, I am forwarding the portion of the document that I spoke to you about. The requester has asked that this be given priority as quickly as possible. He will be leaving for another assignment by the end of the week and would like to have this cleared up before leaving.

The requester, Millard Burr, Special Asst. to the Geographer, 632-2022 would like to have this portion of document declassified.

Thank you for your assistance.

DO NOT use this form as a RECORD of approvals, concurrences, disposals, clearances, and similar actions

FROM: (Name, org. symbol, Agency/Post)	Room No.—Bldg.
<i>Sylvia Blumenthal</i> Sylvia Blumenthal, INR/IC	8646 NS
<i>Dept of State</i>	Phone No.
5041-102	632-0950

OPTIONAL FORM 41 (Rev. 7-76)

Prescribed by GSA
FPMR (41 CFR) 101-11.206

☆ U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1979—280-184/12

BEST COPY

Available

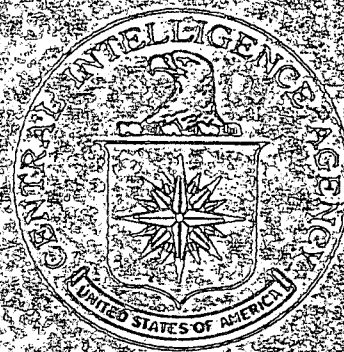
SECRET
NOFORN

NO

13

GEOGRAPHIC INTELLIGENCE REPORT

NORTHERN AFGHANISTAN



CIA/RR-G-21

March 1958

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND REPORTS

NOFORN
SECRET

S-E-C-R-E-T

Start

I. Introduction

Northern Afghanistan, a region once denied to the Tsars and later to the Soviets, is to be a target in the campaign to expand Soviet influence in Asia. Soviet pressure has effectively prevented American ground observation within the region, and the Afghan Government has prohibited American aerial photography of the area.

It is assumed that aerial photography of this region has been or soon will be flown by the USSR. An American firm has already photographed southern Afghanistan for the Afghan Government, and has negotiated for permission to provide coverage for gaps that exist between the Soviet photography and the American. 1/ If the Soviets are able to obtain the American photography, they will possess complete coverage of Afghanistan.

This study presents to the reader a subject known to the Soviets in great detail -- the regional geography of Afghanistan north of the Hindu Kush.

II. Physical Background

A. Nature of the Border

For the first hundred miles west of China the northern border of Afghanistan runs over land -- largely mountain ridges and peaks -- as far as an island near the eastern end of Sar-i-köl (Lake Victoria: 73°47'E). Westward beyond this point, it follows an east-west course through the center of Lake Victoria, continues down the Pamir River, which begins at Lake Victoria, and along the Ab-i-Wakhān and Ab-i-Panja (Amu Darya downstream from about 69°20'E) River to Kham-i-Āb, the northwesternmost riverine village in Afghanistan, about halfway between Kelif and Kerki, USSR. At this point the boundary leaves the Amu Darya and runs in general southwestward, almost entirely over land, and about a mile and a half north of Zulfiqar, reaches the north-flowing Hari Rud, which here forms the boundary with Iran. In the extreme east the Wakhan Corridor is so narrow -- 8 to 40 miles -- that all of it falls within the scope of this report. Its southern and eastern boundary with China, Jammu and Kashmir, and Pakistan follows a line of very high mountain ridges and passes and is not otherwise clearly defined, except for a few stone cairns (see Map 10944).

The portion of the boundary between the Amu Darya and Iran, some 400 miles, was originally marked by 79 survey stations, approximately 1 every 10 kilometers; but the nature, size and appearance of such stations is not known. However, each was

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

marked at least by pillars, as in Figure 1. Two large pillars were placed 5 meters apart, equidistant from the boundary, and a much smaller pillar was set on a line between them -- directly on the boundary line. Such a set of 3 pillars is also said to be located every 2-1/2 kilometers, making 3 sets of pillars between stations. Where the boundary is determined by a watercourse, 2 boundary pillars are erected on the land on opposite sides of the watercourse, 1 pillar within the territory of each country. Pairs of pillars, marked as in Figure 1, are erected at intervals of 2-1/2 kilometers. The actual boundary designated is the center of the deepest part of the channel; but in upper reaches, where there is no navigation and a "deepest channel" is of little significance, the actual boundary is the midpoint of the stream. In all, 1,192 islands in the Amu Darya, (Ab-i-Panja) and Pamir Rivers are numbered and are allocated to either USSR or Afghanistan, in most cases by determining the deepest part of the channel. 2/

The markers and stations here mentioned are believed to have been installed or possibly reexamined and recorded by the Joint Soviet-Afghan Border Commission in 1947-48. No work 3/ was done by this commission on the 100 miles of land boundary east of Lake Victoria, the 12 boundary pillars previously established there having been considered adequate for so remote an area. A protocol 4/ of the agreement that established the mixed boundary commission on 13 June 1946 is available, but copies of the maps made by the commission (122 sheets at 1:50,000) are probably held only by Moscow and Kabul; certainly they are not available in the United States. Likewise the commission's detailed description of the boundary, as provided for in the agreement, is not available. To date the Afghans have given the United States only a "cleansed version" of the boundary demarcation maps, the reliability of which is unknown.

B. Terrain and Vegetation

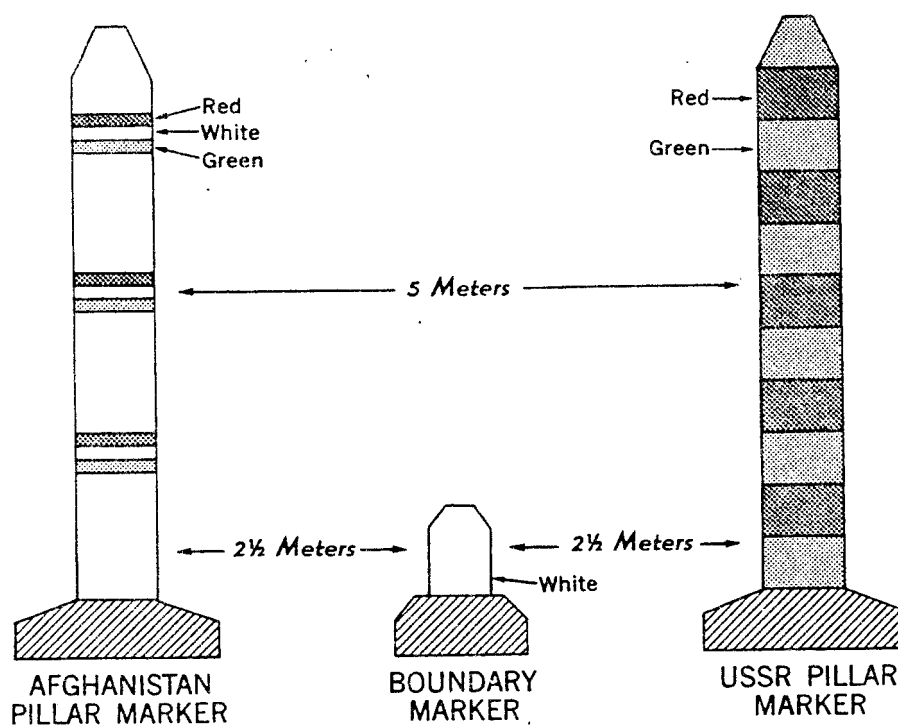
1. The High Rugged Country of the East

a. The Wakhan Corridor

The Wakhan Corridor is generally thought of as extending from the Afghan village of Ishkashim at its lower or western end to the Wakhjir Pass (Wakhjir Dawan) at the Chinese border on the east. At the eastern end the border is divided by a westward salient of Chinese territory -- one segment continuing to the northeast and the other to the southeast. Consequently, Afghan territory actually extends east of Wakhjir Pass on the north and on the south (see Maps 13327 and 13685). From Ishkashim to the easternmost point of Afghanistan is 185 airline miles, whereas the distance to the Wakhjir Pass is only 165 miles. The Corridor is widest (40 miles) in the middle,

- 4 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

SECRET

USSR—AFGHANISTAN BOUNDARY MARKERS

Center marker and distances apply to a land boundary only. A watercourse boundary is marked by placing the two large pillars on opposite banks.

Figure 1

SECRET

S-E-C-R-E-T

where it includes the Nicholas Range, and narrowest in the western third of its extent, where width ranges from 8 to 15 miles except at the headwaters of the north-flowing Ishtrāgh River (71°49'E) where the width reaches 18 miles. At the western entrance, the Corridor is 11 miles wide.

The country is extremely rugged. The mountains are young, as mountains go, and have not been rounded off by erosion; conversely little silt and rock material has been deposited in the valleys. Only the largest valleys have floodplains of even moderate proportions; the rest are V-shaped and are occupied by fast streams or rushing torrents. In past millenia, however, glaciation of the "mountain" type has been extensive -- probably not covering all the land mass but certainly filling and scouring the valleys and making much of their lower walls nearly vertical. As the rivers of ice diminished and were replaced by rivers of water, the larger valleys were partly filled with silt, rock rubble, and glacial boulders and now approximate plains in appearance because the streams do not have volume enough to scour deep channels. Such a flat valley floor, with its wandering stream, characteristically has a partial cover of grass and glacial boulders, may contain a chain of shallow lakes in peaty soil, and may be miles wide and dozens of miles long. It is called a "pamir" (Figure 2).*

There is no travel by wheeled vehicles in the Wakhan Corridor. All transportation is by foot or horse, and east of Nurss the imperturbable yak is also a beast of burden. The term "trail" as applied in the Corridor and also in much of the rest of Badakshan does not necessarily imply a visible path where others have obviously walked. At its minimum significance, the trail may be only a way or access route along which it is possible to scramble with pack animals.

The Wakhjīr Pass in the southeast prong of the Corridor provides access between Wakhan Pamir on the west and Taghdumbash Pamir, which extends east and north into China. The flat floors of both pamirs end some 10 miles from the pass, and the intervening 20-mile stretch through the pass is rough. The northeast prong of the Corridor is occupied by the Little Pamir, 1 to 4 miles wide, which extends first

*The term "Pamirs," used in the plural and usually capitalized, refers in general to the high mountain area of central Asia, covering parts of China, USSR, and Afghanistan. In the USSR the terms Eastern Pamir and Western Pamir are used for two regions, not political subdivisions, within Gorno-Badakhshanskaya Autonomous Oblast.

S-E-C-R-E-T



Figure 2. Looking northwest across part of the Little Pamir at Bozai Gumbaz, $37^{\circ}07'N-74^{\circ}01'E$. The buildings are tombs. A rider on horseback could cross the steeply-sloping "terrace", but not the peaks in the distance.

northeastward and then north in the valley of the Aq Su River as far as Ak-Tash in USSR, and southwestward to Bozai Gumbaz ($74^{\circ}E$) in Afghanistan. Within the pamir, Chakmaktin Kol and the string of small shallow lakes northeast of it constitute an indefinite drainage divide between the Aq Su River, flowing northeastward, and the Little Pamir River, which flows southwestward through the southwestern end of the Little Pamir. Most of the water is believed to flow down the Aq Su.

East of the latitude of Langar ($73^{\circ}47'E$), the Corridor consists of only the drainage basins mentioned above and, except for the Aq Su valley, is bounded by high ridges. This area is nearly the Roof of the World -- peaks and passes range from 16,000 to 20,000 feet above sea level; Chakmaktin Kol is more than 13,000 feet; the Ab-i-Wakhan begins as melt water from a permanent glacier 5 miles south of Wakhjir Pass; and bare rock or shale is exposed on the hillsides, which are barren of any significant vegetation. Even the moist pamirs have no trees, but their bunch grass is valuable as forage for pack animals.

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

All travel is through the lowlands; in some places excess water is a problem, as in the lower 10 miles of the Wakhan Pamir (between Wakhjir village and Bozai Gumbaz).

In the southeast prong of the Corridor, about halfway between Wakhjir Pass and Bozai Gumbaz, it is apparently possible to turn south up watercourses and cross the border at Delhi Sang Pass, elevation 20,000 feet. Much of the trail is over permanent snowfields. From here southeastward the steep and slippery descent into Hunza continues through Kalam Darchi to Misgar at 10,000 feet, where a telegraph line connects the former princely state of Hunza with the rest of India-Pakistan. The principal route from the Corridor to Hunza, however, is more roundabout -- eastward through the Wakhjir Pass to the head of the Taghdumbash Pamir, then southward through the Kilik Pass (Kilik Dawan) or the Mintaka Pass to Kalam Darchi. Some 10 miles east of Langar, a side trail takes off to the south and connects with a network of trails leading, as does the trail over Delhi Sang Pass, to Hunza and to Gilgit in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir. On the eastern route, west of Delhi Sang Pass, is the Irshad Uwin Pass (16,300 feet), which is in reality two passes less than a mile apart that provide alternate trails for 4 or 5 miles. Farther west and nearer Langar are the Khora Bhurt (15,200 feet) and Qalander Uwin (19,390 feet) Passes. They are open to men on foot only (no ponies) and only for a few weeks in spring and autumn.

Trails also lead northward out of the northeast prong of the Corridor, cross the drainage divide via high passes such as the Andamin (Andamin Dawan) and Urta-bel' (Pereval Urta-bel'), and lead down into the Great Pamir east of Lake Victoria. Some 20 miles northeast of Bozai Gumbaz the Andamin Stream (Andamin Jilga) enters from the northwest into the confused drainage pattern of the water divide (the Aq Su headwaters). Apparently, it is possible to proceed up the Andamin Stream and its western tributary, skirting Salisbury Peak (about 19,000 feet) along its eastern and northern slopes, and then cross the border into the USSR at Andamin Pass (15,130 feet). A little lake at the crest has outlets to both north and south. From here northward and eastward the route follows another Andamin Stream (Andamin Su) and the Istyk River, eventually reaching the north-flowing Aq Su at Takhtamysh 25 miles north of Kyzyl-Rabat. Some 8 miles east of the confluence of the Andamin Jilga and Aq Su Rivers, 28 miles east of Bozai Gumbaz, a short steep trail swings northward to Urta-bel' Pass (about 14,100 feet) and then down to the Istyk River route.

West of the latitude of Langar the southern boundary of the Corridor continues to follow high ridge lines, as it does to the east, but the northern boundary follows watercourses. Between Langar and Qala Wust the Corridor reaches its greatest width, including the

S-E-C-R-E-T

Nicholas Range, a practically unexplored mountain mass with an east-northeast--west-southwest ridge. The ridge is highest near the eastern end and apparently slopes down gradually to the west. About 3 miles east of this unnamed high point is Waram Pass, through which runs a trail from Langar to Lake Victoria on the USSR border.

While some travelers have gone through the Great Pamir both east and west of Lake Victoria, probably without encountering difficult terrain, most travelers in the Corridor have been en route between Afghanistan and China or India and have therefore used the Wakhan Pamir. On this tortuous Ab-i-Wakhan route the nearly barren valley walls rise steeply to the north and south, permitting very little floodplain development. In places, there is insufficient room near the river for a footpath, which must therefore cut back into the mountains, as between Qala Panja and Qala Wust. East of Sarhad-i-Wakhan, the route leaves the river to climb the Daliz Pass; halfway between Sarhad-i-Wakhan and Langar it not only leaves the river but has been built onto -- not into -- the hillside with brush and stones. The bridge over the Shor River (Shor Jilga; 73°35'E) is a shaky one-horse structure (Figure 3) that could be sent to the bottom of the small gorge by one good push. Apparently Sarhad-i-Wakhan occupies a strategic position on a south-facing slope above the steep river bank, and there is no way of circumventing it -- the trail from the west (Figure 4) crosses to the north bank at Nurss a mile or two west of Sarhad-i-Wakhan; to the east the trail rises steeply above the north bank (Figure 5); and the trail from the south crosses the river directly to Sarhad-i-Wakhan.

Baroghil Pass is the lowest crossing point in the mountain chain that defines the south rim of the Corridor, not only in the Langar-Qala Panja sector but also for the entire Corridor. On maps and in reports its elevation is quoted as 12,480 feet above sea level, which makes it only 1,500 feet above Sarhad-i-Wakhan. The trail over the pass leads in general due south from Sarhad-i-Wakhan, crossing the Ab-i-Wakhan about a mile east of its confluence with the north-flowing Warsing River (Ab-i-Warsing); it then cuts southwest to, and up, the Warsing River valley. As an alternate route the Ab-i-Wakhan can be crossed west of the confluence, and the broad marshy lower Warsing valley can be followed for 3 miles before the gentle rise begins. The crest of the mountains lies about 10 airline miles from Sarhad-i-Wakhan and consists of a nearly level expanse of grass and loose stone some 600 yards wide. Through Baroghil Pass sheep move southwestward to be bartered for sugar, tea, and cloth from the Chitral Agency. For travelers from Sarhad-i-Wakhan bound due south of Darkot and Yasin, another alternate route branches southeastward off the Baroghil route about halfway up to the ridge, and tops the ridge at Darwazo Pass (Darwazo An; 12,730 feet), some 4 miles east of the Baroghil.

S-E-C-R-E-T

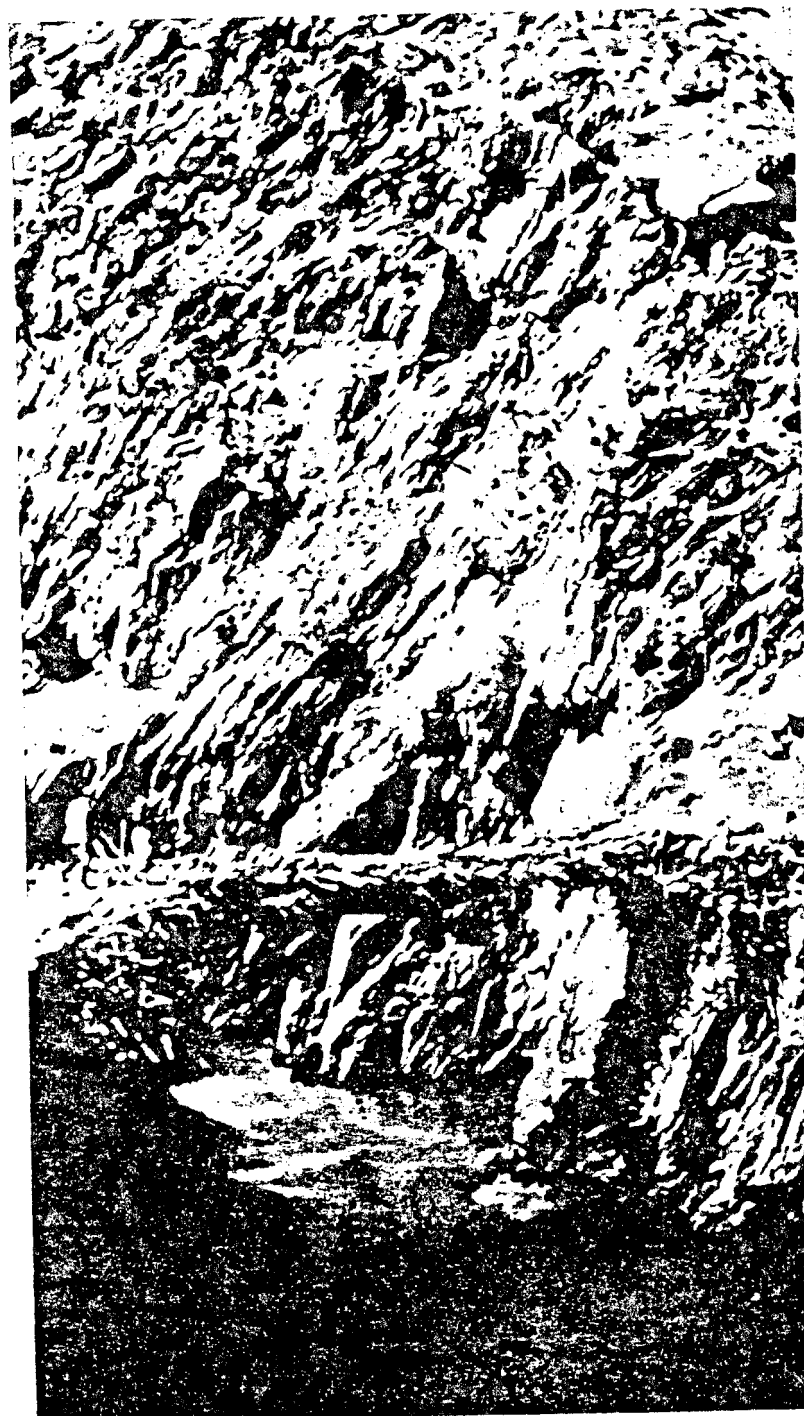


Figure 3. A shaky bridge of logs paved with stones and twigs crossing the Shor River at approximately 37°00'N-73°35'E.

- 9 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T



Figure 4. Looking southwest from the south bank of the Ab-i-Wakhan a few miles west of Nurss. The riders are headed downstream, well above the river that flows in the gorge below. The nameless peak (22,500 feet) in the distance is in Pakistan.



Figure 5. Looking west-northwest down the Ab-i-Wakhan and the western slopes of Daliz Pass from $36^{\circ}58'30''\text{N}$ - $73^{\circ}28'30''\text{E}$, just east of Sarhad-i-Wakhan. At the base of the hill in the right middle distance is the village of Sarhad-i-Wakhan. The two foremost animals are yaks.

- 10 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

Between Sarhad-i-Wākhān and Qala Panja, 3 other passes are also used (see Map 13327) -- the Kān Khūn (16,300), Ochhili (17,350), and Phur Nisini (17,200) -- all of which lead to Chitral. Although the Phur Nisini is easier than the Anoshāh Pass (Kach Pass) to the west or the Ochhili to the east, it is suitable only for men with light loads and not for animals.

The lower Corridor, from Qala Panja to Ishkāshīm, differs markedly from the rough, cut-up country to the east. There is still a mountain wall to the north and one to the south, but the drop between the 2 villages that are some 65 miles apart is only 550 feet (from 9,050 to 8,500 feet); and the flat floodplain ranging from a few yards to a mile in width makes traveling easy all the way (Figure 6). But in

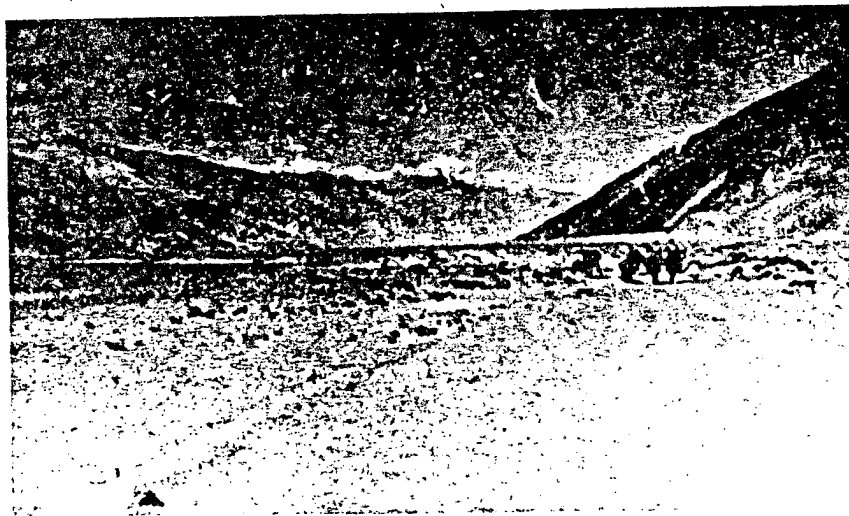


Figure 6. An unusually wide section of the Āb-i-Panja floodplain in the lower Corridor. The view was taken looking north-northeast in midafternoon, late August, about 40 miles east of Ishkāshīm and 7 miles east of Urgand. The 23,000-foot peak in the distance is in the USSR and appears to the traveler to be the highest peak for dozens of miles.

this part of the Corridor, where mountains rise 10,000 to 15,000 feet above the trail, travelers can get the impression of being "in a box." They are in the same "box" with the Russians, however, since Russian Ishkashim is just across the Āb-i-Panja from Afghan Ishkāshīm; the Russian road on the north side perforce follows the river, as does the Afghan trail; and, at Afghan settlements such as Shikarf, Russian sentries may be only 200 yards away. In this sector the southern wall can be crossed in 3 places: the Anoshāh Pass, 14 airline miles

S-E-C-R-E-T

south of Pagui; the Kotgāz, 11 miles south of Shikarf; and the Ishtrāgh, some 15 miles south of Ishtrāgh. West of the Corridor mouth, 6 other passes can be approached from Zebak.

b. Ishkashīm to Tālīqān

Practically no information is available on the country in the big bend of the Āb-i-Panja north of the Zebak-Tālīqān road other than that which can be read from the inaccurate maps of the area.* Certainly it is wild and rugged country, much of it between 9,000 and 15,000 feet (see Map 13685). Most of the slopes are too steep and the precipitation is too scanty to permit more than occasional scrubby tree growth. The usual vertical zonation of vegetation is observable -- with trees at the lowest and wettest elevations, thick grass on the pamirs and sparse grass on the moister slopes, scattered alpine-type vegetation on the slopes above them, and a nearly barren zone just below the snow line. Probably this area has even less non-local travel than the Corridor. All travel east of the Rustāk-Samti road and north of Faizābād is by foot or horse. The central mountain mass, however, makes it easier to follow the encircling Āb-i-Panja, difficult though it is, than to cross the mountains. As far downstream as its junction with the Kyzyl-Su (37°36'N-69°25'E), the Āb-i-Panja continues to flow through steep-walled valleys that have almost no floodplains. In some places, the valleys are chasm-like for several miles (Figure 7); and the trail can follow the riverbed only at lowest water if at all.

c. Drainage

In the mountains of the high, rugged country of the east the drainage pattern is a network of perennial streams and small torrents. The fact that there are pamirs in the Corridor and apparently none in the big bend area indicates that the Corridor has a certain amount of standing surface water whereas the big bend has almost none. Particularly in summer when melt water is released, the pamirs are wet and in some places swampy. Chakmaktin Kol is merely a deeper and possibly marshy section within the Aq Su-Little Pamir River drainage divide. Lake Victoria is 12 miles long, 1 to 3 miles wide, and has no flowing surface outlet; but water probably seeps westward. The wet areas within 10 miles east and south of its eastern end may be swamps or lakes. North of Ishkashīm is glacier-fed Shiwa Lake,

*Many statements in this study are general or vague, not from choice but because of the highly unsatisfactory nature of statistical and map information. Afghanistan has practically no machinery for the systematic collection of data. .

S-E-C-R-E-T

which is nearly round and about 5 miles across; it drains into the Āb-i-Panja, 8 miles to the east. The surface is over 7,000 feet in elevation, and the lake is frozen nearly three-fourths of the year. One source credits it with an altitude of 11,000 feet and a depth of 100 feet. 5/ The fact that no other lakes are shown on available maps may well be due to the lack of exploration, especially in the big bend area. Everywhere, spring and early summer are the seasons of greatest water flow, and late summer and winter the time of low water. Travel is seriously hampered during May-July. Probably the ideal time for travel is September, a month of relatively low water before the snow and cold weather set in.



Figure 7. Looking due west down the Āb-i-Panja from above the right bank at $37^{\circ}57'N-71^{\circ}34'E$. The river here is some 6,500 feet above sea level. The village of Rushan (Qala Wamar) lies 2 miles downstream on the right bank, hidden by the promontory at the right. The Bartang River, flowing southwestward, joins the Āb-i-Panja about a mile to the south (left of the camera). The latter changes its course from north to west-northwest at this confluence. Beyond the bend in the middle distance, the Āb-i-Panja flows west-southwest on a wide flat floor until it is again closely confined by steep banks about 8 miles downstream.

End

S-E-C-R-E-T